

OCTOBER 27, 2020

# Reopening Schools in California

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PRESENTED TO: Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 2  
On Education Finance  
Hon. Kevin McCarty, Chair



LEGISLATIVE ANALYST'S OFFICE

# Major State Actions Affecting School Reopening

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## 2020-21 Budget Package Adopted in June Set Expectations for In-Person Instruction

- Requires schools to offer in-person instruction to the greatest extent possible and allows distance learning to be offered under specific conditions. Sets requirements for distance learning to ensure continuity in student learning.
- Suspends requirements for annual instruction minutes to provide schools additional flexibility and allows minimum instructional day requirements be met through a combination of in-person instruction and distance learning.
- Provides \$5.3 billion to schools through the learning loss mitigation program to support distance learning and school reopening.

## Administration Established County Tier Framework, Which Guides School Reopening

- On August 28, 2020, the Governor established a four-tier framework to guide county reopening and which affects schools reopening for in-person instruction. Counties fall into one of four tiers—Purple (widespread), Red (substantial), Orange (moderate), and Yellow (minimal). Tiers are based on coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) case rates per 100,000 people and testing positivity rates.
- Regardless of tier, schools may reopen to serve small groups of high-need students, including students with disabilities and English learners. Schools in counties within the Purple tier are only allowed to reopen for students in kindergarten through grade 6 through the elementary school waiver process.
- Schools are allowed to reopen for all students once the county is in the Red tier for at least 14 days.
- Once allowed to reopen, the ultimate decision to do so is left up to districts, county offices of education, and independently operated charter schools.

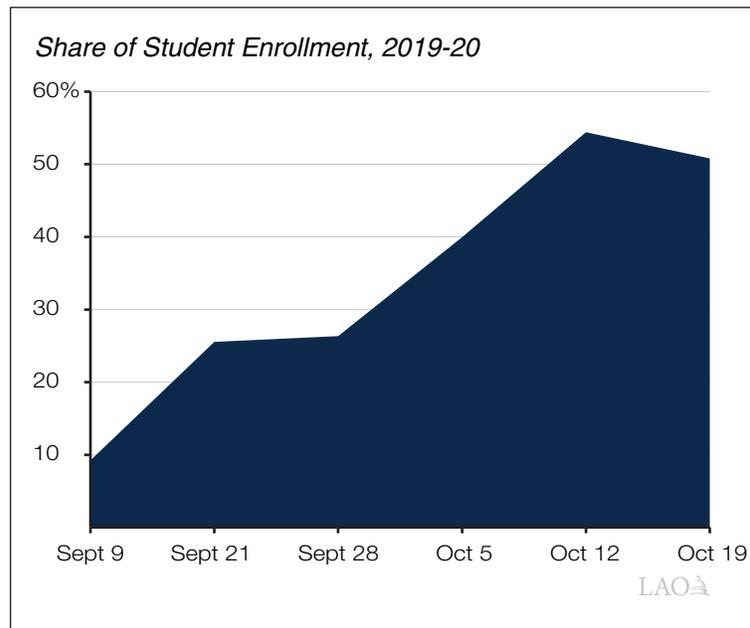


# Major State Actions Affecting School Reopening

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## Half of All K-12 Students Reside in a County Permitted to Reopen Schools



# Guidance for Reopening Schools

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## Various Entities Have Released Guidance on School Reopening

- The California Department of Education first released its guidance on June 8, 2020.
- The California Department of Public Health first released its guidance for schools on July 17, 2020 and continues to update this guidance.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention first released guidance for schools on July 23, 2020 and continues to update this guidance.
- Many county offices of education are collaborating with their local health jurisdiction to issue additional guidance.
- Various other entities have released guidance on school reopening, including the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence and the American Academy of Pediatrics.



# Guidance for Reopening Schools

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## Guidance Is Not Always Consistent

### Examples of State and County Level Guidance on Physical Distancing

California Department of Public Health	California Department of Education	Sample County Office of Education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Maximize space between seating and desks.</li><li>• Distance teacher and other staff desks at least six feet away from student desks.</li><li>• Consider ways to establish separation of students through other means if practicable, such as, six feet between desks, partitions between desks, markings on classroom floors to promote distancing, or arranging desks in a way that minimizes face-to-face contact.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Determine maximum capacity for students of each classroom while meeting six-foot physical distancing objectives.</li><li>• Plan to limit the number of people in all campus spaces to the number that can be reasonably accommodated while maintaining a minimum of six feet of distance between individuals.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• As practicable, desks should be placed six feet apart and arranged in a way that minimizes face-to-face contact.</li><li>• However, with cohorts in place, it is permissible to relax the six-foot recommendation if it ensures all/more students receive in-class instruction. (For example, if reducing to five feet allows for more practicable cohort sizes.) This is also in accordance with American Academy of Pediatrics guidance.</li><li>• Face coverings and cohort stability are higher priorities if they allow for more practical utilization of physical spaces to provide in-person instruction.</li></ul>

## Schools Have Local Control Over Most Aspects of Reopening

- The Governor’s executive orders require school districts to comply with state and local public health guidance, but districts may otherwise design their plans for reopening schools.



# Considerations for Supporting School Reopening

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## Best State Policies to Support School Reopening Remain Unclear

- To date, the federal government has not implemented any nationwide rules for school reopening.
- Due to the short time frame and limited evidence, best practices at the state level have yet to emerge.

## Potential State Actions to Support School Reopening

- Provide more tailored technical assistance to school districts in developing reopening plans, including on-site or virtual consultations from state public health officials as schools transition to in-person instruction.
- Use data to inform decisions.
  - Track and report COVID-19 cases in schools.
  - Assist schools in case investigation, contact tracing, data interpretation, and response to outbreaks.
- Provide clearer guidance on COVID-19 testing.
  - Support outside collaborations that allow schools to develop a testing plan and access routine testing for school staff and students.
  - As rapid antigen tests become more widespread, provide technical assistance to schools in how to incorporate these into their testing plans.
  - As vaccines become available, provide guidance to schools about vaccine distribution and administration.



# Considerations for Supporting School Reopening

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## **Any State Actions Would Require Increases in State Spending**

- Providing greater technical assistance (from review of school reopening plans to interpretation of testing data) likely requires hiring additional skilled staff.
- Tracking and reporting data could require improved data systems at the school district or state level.
- Improving access to and increasing COVID-19 testing could add significant costs.

